

Waterfowl Advisory Committee
Minutes, August 5, 2008
Rembert Dennis Building
Columbia, South Carolina

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chair Sam Hiott, "Tadpole" Baldwin, Carlyle Blakeney, Jr., Billy Ray Cato, Campbell Cox, Lin Fore, Robin Inabinet, Craig Sasser, Phil Wilkinson, Parker Barnes, Jr., Stephen Thomas

MEMBER ABSENT:

Craig LeSchack

DNR STAFF PRESENT:

Laurel Barnhill, Breck Carmichael, Sam Chappelle, Jamie Dozier, Dean Harrigal, Bob Perry, Susan Johnson, Jamie Rader, Derrell Shipes, Major Gregg Smith

Chair Hiott opened the meeting and the minutes of the May 13, 2008 meeting were approved as submitted.

RESIDENT CANADA GOOSE DEPREDATION PERMITS:

Derrell Shipes, Chief, Statewide Projects, Research and Survey, announced that DNR has received authority from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to begin issuing take permits for "problem" resident Canada geese to individual landowners. Shipes stated the permit allows DNR the authority to issue depredation permits to individuals to manipulate nests, eggs, and to kill problem Canada geese. The permit authorizes DNR to allow the removal of up to 2,000 Canada geese per year. This number is independent of those geese taken by activities of the USDA Wildlife Services staff in SC. A condition of the permit will be to submit specific reporting information to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

In developed communities, DNR will require approval from the homeowners' association before a permit will be issued. If there is no homeowner's association, and the area is highly developed (i.e. Lake Murray), consent from the two adjacent property owners to the permit requestor will be required prior to the issuance of a permit.

DHEC NOTICE OF PROPOSED DECISION FOR TDMLS IN SANTEE BASIN:

Bob Perry of DNR's Environmental Section distributed a handout titled "Fecal Coliform Total Daily Maximum Load (TDML) for Shellfish Area 06B" (copy attached to the original minutes). Perry stated committee members may have heard of a controversy involving a Notice of Proposed Decision (NOPD) by DHEC for a TMDL limit for this area in the Santee River watershed. Shellfish area 06B covers the mainland portion and Murphy Island on Santee Coastal Reserve, and the upper portion of the intertidal wetlands of the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. The NOPD addresses high levels of fecal coliform bacteria documented during sampling over a 36 month period (January 2004 to December 2006). Waterfowl managers and plantation owners have been alarmed over the NOPD because of the questionable methodology which indicated fecal coliform concentrations are linked generally to wildlife and specifically to waterfowl. Perry stated DHEC could place additional stipulations on permits for waterfowl area enhancements because of the bacteria concentrations. DHEC conducted a public meeting on July 16th to gather input on this issue. DNR staff attended as well as staff from the

Department of Transportation and Charleston County. DNR expressed its disagreement with DHEC's methodology, findings and conclusions in its NOPD. Perry stated in summary, science does not support use of the NOPD to conclude wildlife and waterfowl specifically are the cause of high fecal coliform counts during the sampling period. Subsequently, DHEC withdrew the NOPD, and DNR's Office of Environmental Programs will work with DHEC and other agencies to redraft a new NOPD for this shellfish area so that DNR concerns regarding the origin of fecal coliforms are addressed more satisfactorily.

GOVERNOR'S WOOD DUCK BOX PROGRAM:

Derrell Shipes reminded Committee Members this program is one of the major expenditures under the annual state duck stamp budget. Shipes stated during the past year, 571 boxes were issued to 95 applicants. Shipes noted he is administering the program (due to the departure of wildlife biologist Walt Rhodes) with the help of WFF staff Dean Harrigal and Cathy Bazzel. Supplies for the coming year have been requisitioned and bids will soon be awarded. Plans are to construct approximately 1,000 boxes, once again in partnership with the Wateree Correctional Facility. Construction of predator guards will be contracted to a private vendor. Staff is working on earlier distribution of the boxes to property owners (hopefully in November or early December). Additionally, staff is researching a different building material (other than cypress) for the construction of the boxes. Shipes stated productivity information is no longer collected due to a lack of change in data after years of collection.

2006-07 WATERFOWL HARVEST ESTIMATES:

Wildlife Biologist Dean Harrigal distributed copies of the Fish and Wildlife Service's annual harvest figures and a summary of estimated waterfowl harvest and hunter activity in SC from 1999-2007 (copies attached to the original minutes). Harrigal stated the overall harvest was down last year, especially for wood ducks. Harrigal suggested this was due to a decrease in active hunters and a decrease in average seasonal bag per hunter. Additionally, the drought last fall had a great impact on waterfowl habitat, and probably availability of birds to hunters, especially in the case of wood ducks.

INCREASE IN WOOD DUCK BAG LIMIT:

Dean Harrigal distributed copies of a document entitled "A Proposed Assessment and Decision Making Framework to Inform Harvest Management of Wood Ducks in the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways" and a copy of the Flyway Council's Joint Recommendation for a 3 bird daily bag limit for a 3 year experimental period (copy attached to the original minutes). Harrigal explained the evolution of the strategy and the proposed 3 year experiment with a 3-bird limit. Harrigal pointed out that the harvest rate for resident wood ducks in South Carolina is approximately 9% below the estimated allowable kill rate of 23% for southern birds. Harrigal also distributed copies of South Carolina wood duck harvest rate estimates (copy attached to the original minutes). Harrigal explained that the northern adult male is the major monitoring cohort for the study because it is the most heavily harvested bird in the Flyway. Harrigal stated northern states will raise the alarm flag immediately if harvest rates on these birds get at the upper limits of allowable kill rates.

2008-09 DNR STAFF WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATIONS:

Derrell Shipes distributed the late season framework as provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and a copy of staff waterfowl season recommendations (copies attached to the original minutes). Shipes stated notable changes in the framework from the previous year are the availability of a bag limit of 3 for wood ducks, and there is no open season on canvasbacks. Additionally, regarding scaup, there is a

framework of no more than 40 consecutive days with a 1 bird limit plus the remaining or up to 20 consecutive days with a 2-bird limit. Dean Harrigal presented staff recommendations for the 2008-09 duck season which include a 50-day season (November 26 through November 30 and December 12 through January 25) with a six bird bag limit. Three wood ducks are recommended as part of the bag limit, and staff suggests a bag limit of 1 scaup for the entire 50 days for simplicity in the regulations. December 6, 2008 was recommended as the State youth day. Federal youth days are January 31 and February 1, 2009.

2008-09 WAC WATERFOWL SEASON RECOMMENDATIONS:

Committee member Steve Thomas made a motion that the WAC recommendation for the 2008-09 waterfowl season take more advantage of the available days by opening the season November 17 instead of November 26, resulting in a 60-day season. Lin Fore seconded the motion. After discussion and a vote, the motion failed. Discussion was then held regarding the scaup options and whether allowing the maximum 2 bird bag limit for 20 days would be confusing to the public. Tadpole Baldwin made a motion that the WAC endorse DNR staff recommendations for the season dates and the inclusion of the 3 wood duck bag limit. The motion was seconded by Robin Inabinet and the motion passed unanimously. There was then discussion regarding the scaup options. Steve Thomas made a motion that the WAC request the DNR Board consider a hybrid scaup season (i.e. the first 30 days of the season there is a limit of 1 scaup, during the last 20 days of the season there will be a limit of 2 scaup). That motion was seconded and also passed. Discussion was then held regarding the potential for allowing 2 hen mallards in the bag as allowed under the federal framework, but no action was taken.

Chair Hiott welcomed DNR Board Chairman Mike McShane as he joined the meeting. McShane thanked the Committee for their work regarding the peer review process. He further stated these reviews can be used as a management tool to each property's management team.

PEER REVIEW UPDATE: Yawkey Project Leader Jamie Dozier stated he had taken the Peer Review Report and prioritized the report's recommendations as high, moderate or low priorities (a copy of Dozier's report is attached to the original minutes). Dozier reported he listed a total of 9 recommendations in the Peer Review Report as being high priority targets. He further reported staff has corrected 7 of the 9 high priority targets. State purchasing/fiscal year deadlines prevented staff from completing the last 2 targets. Mike McShane commended Jamie Dozier for his work at the Yawkey Center. Dozier anticipates having the remaining 2 high priority items completed within the next month. Dozier stated replacing trunks is a seasonal issue and trunks that are not replaced or repaired this season will have to wait until next spring when the water is drawn down. DNR Director John Frampton and Deputy Director Carmichael have reviewed the report and toured the property with Dozier.

There was no old or new business for discussion.

Dave Wielicki (SC Waterfowl Association) applauded DNR Board, staff and the WAC for the 2007-08 waterfowl season. Wielicki stated the added youth day proved to be a tremendous success. Additionally, he reported even with low water levels on Lakes Marion/Moultrie there was very good duck hunting.

Chair Hiott thanked members for attending the meeting and for the overall support of the members.

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING: November 18, 2008, time and location to be announced.

DRAFT